

Emergency Support Function #15 EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

Lead Agency

- Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)

Support Agencies and Organizations

- All Agencies of the Commonwealth of Virginia

Purpose

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 ensures that sufficient assets are deployed during a potential or actual incident to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences. This includes state agencies and local governments, elected officials, the media, the private sector, and the local populace.

Scope & Applicability

ESF #15 coordinates actions to provide the required external affairs support to state and local government incident management operational elements. ESF #15 applies to all state agencies that may require public affairs support or whose public affairs assets may be employed during an incident.

The provisions of this annex apply to incidents where significant interagency coordination is required.

Policies

- All agencies assigned responsibilities within this ESF will develop and maintain the necessary plans, standard operating procedures, mutual aid agreements, and model contracts to successfully accomplish their tasks.
- State planning or preparedness for external affairs functions recognizes local government responsibilities for providing information to their citizens. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities. In the event that a local government is unable to or lacks the capability to perform these

responsibilities, the state may coordinate with the impacted local government to provide vital health and safety information to the affected population.

Organizational Structure

During normal operations, the VDEM Public Information Officer (PIO) uses the Joint Information System to ensure that public information is coordinated among state and local agencies. The PIO works with news media and social networks to communicate preparedness messages. During emergencies and disasters, the PIO is the External Affairs Officer.

During an emergency or disaster situation, the PIO is responsible for establishing and coordinating a central Joint Information Center (JIC) at the state level for receiving and disseminating information to the public. Designated state agencies will be asked to provide qualified personnel to augment the staff at the JIC and could serve as the PIO. The PIO will report directly to the State Coordinating Officer (SCO).

In the event of a substantial disaster, which would trigger a Presidential Declaration, the PIO will work with federal personnel to expand the JIC to include federal staff.

The PIO will be responsible for establishing and managing the Virginia Public Inquiry Center (VPIC) to facilitate the direct dissemination of information to the public.

The PIO will be responsible for the Legislative Liaison function to facilitate the dissemination of information to elected officials.

The PIO will be responsible for the Community Relations function to facilitate disaster victims' access to disaster assistance.

In a JFO, the PIO will manage the External Affairs section that includes the JIC, community relations and legislative liaison functions. The PIO will report directly to the SCO.

Concept of Operations

ESF #15 has five primary goals:

1. To make the public aware of potential emergency situations and of appropriate protective actions.
2. To keep the public informed about an ongoing emergency or disaster situation and to provide protective action guidance as appropriate.
3. To keep public officials, including elected officials, informed of the processes of coordinating the response to and facilitating the recovery from emergencies and disasters.
4. To keep leadership informed about public information issues and media trends.
5. To track and correct rumors and misinformation.

During normal operations, the PIO will implement a public education and awareness program with realistic and measurable objectives. Local governments will be encouraged and assisted in making the public aware of potential hazards and of appropriate protective measures.

In time of emergency, the PIO will coordinate the release of information on emergencies and disasters at the state level when they occur. The PIO will coordinate all such information with the Governor's Press Secretary, the Secretary of Public Safety, other state agencies, the federal government, local governments, and volunteer organizations. Other designated state agencies

will provide qualified professional personnel to assist, as requested.

When a disaster is impending or occurs, the augmented External Affairs staff will be positioned in the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC), which has a designated area equipped for this function. The staff may also be asked to supplement local government PIO efforts or to provide PIO support in the field at the disaster site.

If the disaster warrants a Presidential Declaration, the augmented External Affairs staff will then co-locate with other state and federal response personnel to a Joint Field Office (JFO) when that site is activated. The PIO will ensure coordination with federal personnel and form a Joint Information Center (JIC) operating in the JFO. State External Affairs personnel will be used to assist local PIO efforts in such situations.

The Virginia Emergency Alert System (EAS) is an established medium for the receipt and/or distribution of emergency information to the general public at the local, state, and national levels. The PIO will create messages for broadcast over the EAS system and coordinate their release with VEOC Watch Center staff.

If an incident has the potential for statewide impact, the PIO may activate the memorandum of understanding with 211 Virginia to manage a call center. The VPIC will serve as a support center for 211, to handle more detailed requests for information. The VPIC will be managed according to the Virginia Public Inquiry Plan developed and maintained by the PIO. The VPIC and 211 will have access to accurate and timely information to disseminate to the public.

During response operations, the PIO will designate a Legislative Liaison to make contact with the state and federal legislators who represent impacted cities and counties. As response operations move into recovery operations, the Legislative Liaison will coordinate with the federal Congressional Liaison, the Office of the Governor, and the

state staff in the JFO to keep elected officials informed of recovery efforts.

In a JFO, the External Affairs section will include the JIC, the Community Relations section and the Legislative Liaison. The PIO will manage the section and report directly to the SCO.

The Community Relations (CR) section is responsible for helping residents in an affected area to learn about available assistance, including federal disaster assistance, state disaster relief fund assistance or low-interest loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration. CR deploys a federal/state team to each affected city and county. CR ensures that local officials and local citizens are aware of the availability of assistance and have access to apply for the benefits for which they may be eligible.

Roles & Responsibilities

Virginia Department of Emergency Management

- Coordinate with the news media, localities, and others to promote emergency preparedness.
- Establish and coordinate a central JIC for receiving and disseminating information to the public during a disaster or emergency.
- Coordinate the Community Relations function to facilitate disaster victims' access to disaster assistance.
- Manage information sharing with local and state elected officials through the Legislative Liaison function.

All Agencies of the Commonwealth of Virginia

- Coordinate emergency-related public information with VDEM using the Joint Information System and provide staff to the Joint Information Center when necessary.

Authorities & References

Authorities

- Virginia Emergency Services and Disaster Laws
- Chapter I, Code of Federal Regulations, Federal Communications Commission

References

- Virginia Public Inquiry Plan
- Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) 4.6.3: The emergency operations/response plan shall identify and assign specific areas of responsibility for performing essential functions in response to an emergency or disaster. Areas of responsibility to be addressed include: emergency public information.
- Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) 4.10: Communications and Warning
- Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) 4.15: Crisis Communications, Public Education, and Information